



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Statement Concerning Request to Extend the United States' Destruction Deadline Under The Chemical Weapons Convention

Ambassador Eric Javits, U.S. Permanent Representative to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)

The Hague, The Netherlands

April 20, 2006

Good morning.

I'd like to thank Chairman Dastis for calling this informal meeting, and I'd like to thank all of you for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here this morning.

As you all know, the United States is requesting that our final chemical weapons destruction deadline, which was extended "in principle" two and a half years ago, be set at April 29, 2012, the latest date allowable under the Chemical Weapons Convention. Yesterday, I submitted our formal request to Chairman Dastis and Director-General Pfirter. This is an important issue, and I wanted to provide you with as much information as possible concerning the U.S. extension request and the reasons for it, so I asked the Chairman to arrange this meeting, and I asked Washington to provide an in-depth briefing. That briefing will begin in a few minutes, but I would like to make a few remarks first.

The United States is dedicated to the success of the Chemical Weapons Convention. We played a leading role in negotiating it. In fact, the basis for the CWC text finally opened for signature in Paris was a draft presented to the Conference on Disarmament by former president George H. W. Bush. We played a leading role in the Preparatory Commission. And we have played an active, constructive role since the treaty entered into force. We began destroying our chemical weapons stockpile years even before the Convention entered into force. And we have provided funding and assistance to other States Parties seeking to destroy chemical weapons stockpiles. Our commitment to the Chemical Weapons Convention is deep, and it is long-standing.

The United States possesses the second largest chemical weapons stockpile in the world. Safely and effectively destroying more than 27 thousand metric tons of assorted chemical weapons is an enormous challenge -- one we have made strenuous efforts to meet. We expect to spend over \$32 billion before we are finished. We have made every effort to ensure that our chemical weapons are destroyed safely, without harm to people or the environment; verifiably, under the eyes of OPCW inspectors; and as rapidly as feasible.

We have had considerable success. We met the first two treaty milestones -- destruction of 1% and 20% of our stockpile -- well ahead of treaty timelines. We have completed operations at two facilities, and six more are currently operating at a cost of a billion and a half dollars a year. We have successfully addressed a wide range of safety and environmental concerns raised by citizens living near our storage and destruction facilities and by state and local authorities.

But we have also experienced setbacks and delays. It has taken longer than anticipated to build facilities and to obtain the necessary permits and consent to begin destruction of chemical weapons, and we have found that, once operating, our facilities have not destroyed weapons as rapidly as we initially projected.

By late 2002, it was clear to us that we would need to request an extension of our 45% deadline -- which was extended to December, 2007 -- and also our 100% deadline. At that time, however, we did not believe that we had sufficient information to project a date for complete destruction of our stockpile. Since then, we have continued to encounter delays and difficulties, as you will hear in the briefing, and have devoted enormous resources to overcoming these obstacles.

I am going to be perfectly candid with you. We are asking for April 29, 2012 as our extended deadline because that is the latest date the treaty allows us to ask for. Based on our current projections, we do not expect to be able to meet that deadline, as you will see in our request.

We are actively seeking ways to improve our situation. To date, we have not identified any option that would allow us to complete destruction by April 2012. But we will continue to seek opportunities to improve our progress, with the goal of reaching the 2012 deadline, or, if that is not possible, completing destruction as soon as feasible thereafter. The U.S. Government is committed to destroying our entire stockpile as rapidly as possible without compromising safety.

I recognize that this news will be of concern to many here. But we do not wish to present a false picture. We are committed to a policy of openness concerning our destruction efforts. We will continue to work closely with the Executive Council and will provide regular updates on our progress. We will seek to ensure that the Executive Council has all the information it needs as we approach the 2012 deadline.

As a first step, we have brought experts from Washington to provide the information you need to consider our request. Mr. Dale Ormond, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for the Elimination of Chemical Weapons, is with us today to speak to you about our request. Mr. Ormond is one of the senior officials in our CW destruction program. Previously, he was the project manager at the Tooele CWDF, our longest-running destruction facility, a site responsible for destroying over 40% of our total stockpile. So this is a man who knows our program intimately, from the ground up. He will describe for you the history of our program, the challenges we have encountered, and our plans to move forward. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Director-General, colleagues, thank you for your attention.

Released on April 20, 2006

 [BACK TO TOP](#)